



# The birth of our Navy

## 225 years of tradtion

Compiled by JOCS(SW) Phil Eggman  
From the Naval Historical Center Website

Americans first took up arms against the British in the spring of 1775, not to sever their relationship with the King of England, but to defend their rights within the British Empire. In fact, by the autumn of that year, the British North American colonies, from Maine to Georgia, were in open rebellion.

Royal governments had been thrust out of many colonial capitals and revolutionary governments put in their places. The Continental Congress had assumed some of the responsibilities of a central government for the colonies, created a Continental Army, issued paper money for the support of the troops, and formed a committee to negotiate with foreign countries.

Continental forces captured Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain and launched an invasion of Canada.

In October 1775 the British held superiority at sea, from which they threatened to stop up the American colonies' trade and to wreak destruction on seaside settlements. In response a few of the states had commissioned small fleets of their own for defense of local waters.

Congress had not yet authorized privateering. Some in Congress worried about pushing the armed struggle too far, hoping that reconciliation with the mother country was still possible. Yet a small coterie of men in Congress had been advocating a Continental Navy from the outset of armed hostilities.

Foremost among these men was John Adams of Massachusetts. For months, he and a few others had been agitating in Congress for the establishment of an American fleet. They argued that a fleet would defend the seacoast towns, protect vital trade, retaliate against British raiders, and make it possible to seek out among neutral nations of the world the arms and stores that would make resistance possible.

Still, the establishment of a navy seemed too bold a move for some of the timid men in Congress. Some southerners agreed that a fleet would protect and secure the trade

of New England but denied that it would that of the southern colonies.

Most of the delegates did not consider the break with England as final and feared that a navy implied sovereignty and independence.

Others thought a navy a hasty and foolish challenge to the mightiest fleet the world had seen. The most the pro-navy men could do was to get Congress to urge each colony to fit out armed vessels for the protection of their coasts and harbors

posals too vague. It lacked specifics and no one could tell how much it would cost. If Congress was yet unwilling to embrace the idea of establishing a navy as a permanent measure, it could be tempted by short-term opportunities.

Fortuitously, on Oct. 5, Congress received intelligence of two English brigs, unarmed and without convoy, laden with munitions, leaving England bound for Quebec.

Congress immediately appointed a committee to consider how to take advantage of this opportunity.

bearing supplies to the British army.

Congress let this plan lie on the table until Oct. 13, when another fortuitous event occurred in favor of the naval movement.

A letter from General George Washington was read in Congress in which he reported that he had taken under his command, at Continental expense, three schooners to cruise off Massachusetts to intercept enemy supply ships.

The commander in chief had preempted members of Congress reluctant to take the first step of fitting out warships under Continental authority. Since they already had armed vessels cruising in their name, it was not such a big step to approve two more.

The committee's proposal, now appearing eminently reasonable to the reluctant members, was adopted.

On Friday, Oct. 13, 1775, meeting in Philadelphia, the Continental Congress voted to fit out two sailing vessels, armed with 10 carriage guns, as well as swivel guns, and manned by crews of 80. The new ships' mission was to go on a cruise of three months and intercept transports carrying munitions and stores to the British army in America.

The Continental Navy grew into an important force. Within a few days, Congress established a Naval Committee charged with equipping a fleet.

This committee directed the purchasing, outfitting, manning, and operations of the first ships of the new navy, drafted subsequent naval legislation, and prepared rules and regulations to govern the Continental Navy's conduct and internal administration

Over the course of the War of Independence, the Continental Navy sent to sea more than 50 armed vessels of various types.

The Navy's squadrons and cruisers seized enemy supplies and carried correspondence and diplomats to Europe, returning with needed munitions.

They took nearly 200 British vessels as prizes, some off the British Isles themselves, contributing to the demoralization of the enemy and forcing the British to divert warships to protect convoys and trade routes.

In addition, the Navy provoked diplomatic crises that helped bring France into the war against Great Britain.

The Continental Navy began the proud tradition carried on today by our United States Navy, and whose birthday we celebrate each year in October.

For more information about U.S. Naval history, see the Navy Historical Center website at <http://www.history.navy.mil>

Then on Oct. 3, 1775, Rhode Island's delegates laid before Congress a bold resolution for the building and equipping of an American fleet, as soon as possible.

When the motion came to the floor for debate, Samuel Chase of Maryland attacked it, saying it was "the maddest idea in the world to think of building an American fleet."

Even pro-navy members found the pro-

Its members were all New Englanders and all ardent supporters of a navy.

They recommended first that the governments of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut be asked to dispatch armed vessels to lay in wait to intercept the munitions ships. Next, they outlined a plan for the equipping by Congress of two armed vessels to cruise eastward to intercept any ships

## Navy historical facts

•The United States Navy traces its origins to the Continental Navy, which the Continental Congress established on Oct. 13 1775 by authorizing the procurement, fitting out, manning, and dispatch of two armed vessels to cruise in search of munitions ships supplying the British Army in America. The legislation also established a Naval Committee to supervise the work. All together, the Continental Navy numbered some 50 ships over the course of the war, with approximately 20 warships active at its maximum strength.

•After the American War for Independence, Congress sold the surviving ships of the Continental Navy and released the seamen and officers. The Constitution of the United States, ratified in 1789, empowered Congress "to provide and maintain a navy." Acting on this authority, Congress ordered the construction and manning of six frigates in 1794, and the War Department administered naval affairs from that year until Congress established the Department of the Navy on April 30, 1798.

•Not to be confused with the Navy Birthday or the founding of the Navy Department is Navy Day. The Navy League sponsored the first national observance of Navy Day in 1922 designed to give recognition to the naval service. The Navy League of New York proposed that the official observance be on October 27 in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt, who had been born on that day.

•In 1972 Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) ADM. Elmo R. Zumwalt authorized recognition of Oct. 13 as the Navy's birthday. In contrast to Navy Day, the Navy Birthday is intended as an internal activity for members of the active forces and reserves, as well as retirees and dependents.

•Since 1972, each CNO has encouraged a Navy-wide celebration of this occasion "to enhance a greater appreciation of our Navy heritage, and to provide a positive influence toward pride and professionalism in the naval service."

## Navy birthday message from SECNAV



The Honorable Richard Danzig,  
Secretary of the Navy

*The following is the text of a message to the Navy from Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig:*

Our Navy — for 225 years — has always been there for America, and in fact, is older than the American Republic itself. Over these years, the most tumultuous in human history, more than 170 nations have emerged or disintegrated.

The Founding Fathers realized at the earliest stages of their great work that creating and preserving a new nation would require the capabilities unique to a naval force, and they saw fit to place into federal service the first American Sailors and ships.

Since then, we have never failed to live up to our awesome responsibilities. In fact, over this period we have increased our power, influence and relevance to the point where what was once a small, junior force is now universally

Navy. While the size and shape of our Navy has changed dramatically throughout our history, the demand for our services has not waned. Throughout this evolution, the secret to our success has been a willingness to change while adhering to our core identity and values. This philosophy has guided us through the reliable performance of our duties during times of peace and war, and will be the key to our continued success in the years ahead.

Birthdays are a time for joy and celebration. A 225th Anniversary is especially to be savored. Happy Birthday Navy!